



Montana
Water
Resources
Association



Oregon Water Resources Congress



Multi-State Letter in Support of S.2886, the Reauthorization of the Fisheries Restoration and Irrigation Mitigation Act of 2000

May 3, 2016

Chairman Murkowski
U.S Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Senator Cantwell, and Members of the Committee:

We are an informal coalition of Pacific Northwest state associations writing to express our shared strong support for the reauthorization of the Fisheries Restoration Irrigation Mitigation Act (FRIMA) Program, which has been introduced as S.2886. Reinstating this essential cost-share funding program will help water users and fishery agencies better protect sensitive, threatened, and endangered fish species while continuing to provide water supply delivery to farms and communities.

Background

Our associations, the Idaho Water Users Association (IWUA), Montana Water Resources Association (MWRA), Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC), and the Washington State Water Resources Association (WSWRA) represent irrigation entities, other water suppliers, and the water users they serve in Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington. The original FRIMA legislation, enacted November 2000 (PL.106-502), was supported and requested by the Pacific Northwest Partnership, a coalition of local governmental entities in the four Northwest states. As representatives of all four members of that coalition, we appreciate and are supportive of your efforts to reauthorize the FRIMA program with the understanding that FRIMA would operate under the same programmatic provisions as the original legislation. The FRIMA program was highly successful until the authorization for this vital funding mechanism expired at the end of 2015. A report by U.S Fish and Wildlife Services (FWS) covering program years FY 2002-2012 provides state-by-state coverage of how the Congressional provided funding has been used in the program.

Program Need & Benefits

The reauthorization of the FRIMA program would benefit irrigation entities and the water users they serve in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and western Montana. Funding for voluntary fish screen and fish passage construction related to water withdrawal projects helps meet a critical need in fishery protection and restoration and compliments other FWS programs. Fish passage and fish screens installations are a vital component to fishery protection with several benefits:

- Keeps sensitive, threatened and endangered fish out of canals and water delivery systems
- Allows fish to be safely navigate around reservoirs and other infrastructure
- Reduces water quality risks to fish species

All of our states are affected by either state or federal Endangered Species Act listings of Salmon and Steelhead, Bull Trout or other sensitive, threatened or endangered species. The design and installation of fish screens and fish passage to protect the myriad of fish species is often cost-prohibitive for individual entities to implement without outside funding sources. Limited cost-share funds are available from local and state funding programs but the primary cost-share for fish screen and fish passage projects has been provided by the various irrigation entities and their water users.

Project needs include both construction of new fish screens and fish passage facilities as well as significant upgrades of existing facilities to meet new requirements (new species, new science) of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Service and the FWS. Upgrades are often needed to modernize facilities with new technologies that provide better protection for fish species as well as reduced maintenance and increased lifespan for the operator. Installing these new technologies not only helps fish but also improves operations and irrigation efficiency by keeping debris out of the water delivery infrastructure.

FRIMA projects provide immediate protection for fish and fills a large unmet need in the Pacific Northwest for cost-share assistance with fish screening and fish passage installations and improvements. FWS studies indicate that compared to other recovery strategies, the installation of fish screens and fish passage infrastructure has the highest assurance for increasing numbers of fish species in the Pacific Northwest. Furthermore, the installation of these devices have minimal impacts on water delivery operations and projects are done cooperatively using methods that are well accepted by landowners and rural communities.

Reauthorizing FRIMA is also a wise investment, with past projects contributing more than the required match and leveraging on average over one dollar for each federal dollar invested. FRIMA provides for a maximum federal cost-share of 65%, with the applicant's cost-share at 35% plus the on-going maintenance and support of the structure for passage or screening purposes. Applicants operate the projects and the state agencies monitor and review the projects.

The reauthorization of FRIMA will fill a vital funding gap for fish screens and fish passage projects that are needed to better protect sensitive, threatened, and endangered fish species, which also benefits the economy, local communities, and the environment we share. FRIMA funds projects that are ready to be constructed and will provide immediate improved protections for fish and immediate jobs for the construction of the projects. Dollar-for-dollar, providing screening and fish passage at diversions is one of the most cost-effective uses of restoration dollars, creating fishery protection at low cost, with low risk and significant benefits.

We strongly support the reauthorization of the Fisheries Restoration and Irrigation Mitigation Act of 2000 and urge the Committee to pass S. 2886. Thank you for efforts to reinstate this valuable program.

Sincerely,

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